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SUBJECT: PORT AUTHORITY RELAUNCHES CONGO RIVER TRAFFIC

11. (U) The GDRC's port authority, ONATRA, has relaunched its own transport operations on the Congo River after a ten-year hiatus. In July, ONATRA began running two 3000-mile round-trips per month between Kinshasa and Kisangani, Orientale province. The upriver trip to Kisangani takes nine days, and the downriver trip takes six days. The boat passes through Bandundu and Equateur provinces en route.

12. (U) ONATRA schedules either a passenger or cargo boat, depending upon demand. Its passenger boat capacity is 100 persons, and a ticket for the entire trip costs about USD 32. The cargo boat can pull five to six barges upriver, with a maximum weight of 4000 tons per barge, at an official fee of USD 70.20 per ton. During the trip to Kisangani, the boat deposits its barges, mainly carrying domestic and imported manufactured goods, at various ports, including Bolobo, Mbandaka and Lisala. On the downriver journey, the cargo boat primarily transports food (such as manioc, maize and beans) and forestry products.

13. (U) The Administrator of the Congolese Chamber of Commerce (FEC) told EconOff that economic operators are divided on whether this development is positive. Some believe this project will not succeed because ONATRA does not have the capacity or the equipment to operate, load and unload a cargo boat. Others optimistically saw ONATRA's lack of equipment as an opportunity to earn income by renting ONATRA the vessels it will need. The Administrator also noted that some of FEC's members already use their own privately-operated boats.

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